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Wall, James Walter

The intellectual
advancement of the age...

Burlington [N.J.]

1851

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The intellectual advancement of the age and its demands on every citizen; a lecture delivered before the Burlington Mechanics library association, September 11, 1851, at the Lyceum hall, by James W. Wall, esq. Burlington, Atkinson, 1851.

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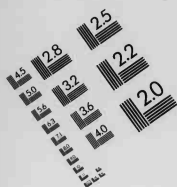
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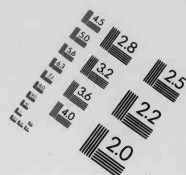
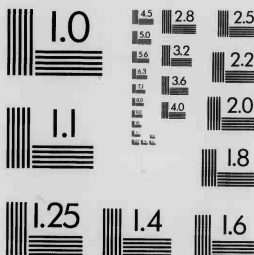
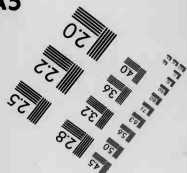
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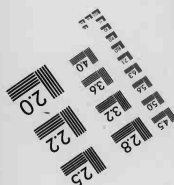


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*Respects
of J. W. Wall*

THE INTELLECTUAL ADVANCEMENT OF THE AGE,
AND
ITS DEMANDS ON EVERY CITIZEN:

A LECTURE,

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE BURLINGTON

MECHANICS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

SEPTEMBER 11, 1851,

AT THE LYCEUM HALL,

By JAMES W. WALL, Esq.

308

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Burlington:

PRINTED BY SAMUEL C. ATKINSON.

1851

June 1, 1931 DA/Hec

Burlington, Sept. 12, 1851.

James W. Wall, Esq.

Dear Sir—At the conclusion of your very interesting Address, delivered last evening, before the Mechanics Library Association, it was, on motion, Resolved, That a Committee be appointed to request a copy of the same for publication. In pursuance of our appointment, as said Committee, we beg leave to request that you will, at your earliest convenience, furnish us with a copy of the same.

Very respectfully,

GEORGE GASKILL,
EDWIN HAAS,
THOMAS MILNOR,

Committee.

Burlington, Sept. 13, 1851.

To Messrs. Gaskill, Haas & Milnor, Committee :

GENTLEMEN—

Yours of the 12th inst. has been received. If the members of the Association think that the sentiments contained in my Address will, through the medium of the press, exert a stronger and wider influence in convincing the Mechanics of Burlington of the necessity existing, earnestly to support their Library Association, I very cheerfully comply with the request they have so flatteringly made through you.

Yours, respectfully,

JAMES W. WALL.

ADDRESS.

Gentlemen of the Mechanics Library Association:—

I have selected for the subject of my Lecture this evening, "The Intellectual Advancement of the Age, and its demands on every Citizen," because I considered it the best adapted to the occasion which has called us together.

The association for mental improvement, of the men of labor, the men, upon whose toil and talent we depend for all that makes life an enjoyment, and society a blessing, is most assuredly an occasion of high importance; and no subject can be better adapted to such an occasion, than a discourse upon the intellectual progress of the age, and the claim which rests upon every citizen, to keep pace with such progress.

Associations of men of one trade have been common in all ages, for uniting interests, strengthening enterprise, and benefitting the world. Associations have been formed, and are constantly forming, for protecting particular classes from want—suffering, and disease. Philanthropy has enlisted under her broad banner, and while heart answers to heart, must continue to enlist earth's noblest spirits for the protection, preservation, and lifting up of down-trodden humanity. But of all associations, none surpass in dignity, and importance, the union of men for intellectual improvement; and first in importance, stands such an union as you this day have formed. A union for mental improvement of the working classes—those sons of toil, without whose aid the world would stand still, the march of improvement be arrested, and the boasted spirit of the age die out.

The object of this Association, is the formation of a Mechanics Library and Reading Room. The great end of such organization, to impart a taste for literary culture, and literary research. To induce, and encourage the devotion of hours, not occupied by labor, to obtaining the rich and valuable information, which systematic reading can impart.—This is a noble and glorious aim; and by so doing, you are aiding in the intellectual advancement of the age, and preparing as far as in you lies, to answer its demands.

Let us now inquire what the intellectual advancement of the age is, and how great its demands are?

The rise and decline of empires, are measured by centuries. The dissolution of old forms of government, has ever been a preparation for new phases of humanity. Dynasties may die out, and forms of authority be changed; but the great Law of progress still urges humanity on—and the destruction of States and empires, has ever been, but as the falling of the leaves in autumn—manuring the soil, preparing for the returning spring—for the growth of richer vegetation and more abundant harvests. The theory of national decay has become obsolete. A community is always renewing itself. If its institutions are but flexible, and elastic; if they are so constituted that instead of coming into collision with the advancing power of the human mind, they allow of the expansion of man's intellectual energies, and accommodate themselves to their growth, there is no reason why a state should not

“Flourish in eternal youth.”

There is, under such circumstances, a vital power and energy in the State, which will hold on, while the world continues, ever realizing larger amounts of happiness. National spirit allowed its free scope, by institutions that encourage liberty and the diffusion of intelligence, is a pledge for such progress. Now I hold it, that in the growing intelligence of

the masses, we have for our own country, the great promise of progress, and the certain pledge of its endurance. The history of this present age affords pregnant indication, that the intelligence of the great body of the industrial classes is rapidly advancing. You may trace the signs in the degree of self-culture, which is evidently extending from year to year: in the evidences of thought and feeling, furnished by almost every public meeting that is held. In the Library Institutions, similar to your own, every where rising, as so many centres of light and knowledge, radiating around, and every where exercising a beneficial influence, the value of which, is not to be measured by the exact number of subscribers, or the amount of funds which they may have in hand. On every side may be discerned the evidence, that the industrial classes in our country are more and more thinking for themselves, and cultivating their own powers and faculties.

The true position of man in the social scale, was but imperfectly understood and appreciated by the Greeks, who in their disproportionate admiration of heroes, overlooked what was due to the common and every-day qualities of men. Man in his private and individual capacity, rises into merited importance only, when he begins to be conscious of his dignity: and sensible of those inalienable rights with which he is endowed by nature, and which acknowledge him as a being, gifted with intellectual powers, susceptible of cultivation, and improvement.

It is the conception of these rights—it is the consciousness of freedom, associated with intellectual power, that inspires man with the greatest self-respect, and the strongest patriotic attachment.

In our glorious republic, every citizen should feel that he has duties to perform, and rights to exercise. That he is not an idle and careless spectator, but an active, and efficient co-operator in the affairs of the world—and more especially of his own country. That, however poor, humble, or ob-

seure he may be, that here at least, in the noble words of Burns,

"A man's a man for a' that."
"The honest man, though e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that."

Here extraordinary privileges, exact of their possessor, extraordinary liabilities and duties. The tranquillity and ease of the sluggard are best promoted under a political system, which demands nothing of him, and permits to him nothing but simply to obey. The very thing for which popular governments are most to be prized is, that they impose responsibilities, and weighty ones on every member of the community. They in a measure, commit to every individual, not only the government of himself, but the government of his fellow citizens, and the care of their interests and welfare. It not unfrequently happens, that on a single vote oftentimes, depends the decision of the question, which of two parties shall hold the ascendancy, which of two classes of men shall rule—which of two antagonistic systems of policy shall prevail. Thus affecting to an incalculable degree, not merely the pecuniary affairs of the country; but more or less of its moral, intellectual and social development. To live in, and make part of such a system, virtually compels every man of moderate conscientiousness, to do all that is in his power, to promote his own intellectual advancement—and to promote and encourage the intellectual advancement of his fellows. And more especially is he summoned to the performance of this high duty—because it has become vitally necessary, in order to enable him to keep pace with the intellectual advancement of the wonderful age in which his lot has been cast.

Each succeeding age and generation, leaves behind it a peculiar character which stands out in bold relief upon its annals, and is associated forever with it in the memory of posterity. One is signalized for the invention of gunpowder—another for that of printing—one is rendered memorable

by the revival of letters—another by the reformation of religion—one epoch is made illustrious by the discoveries of a Newton—another by the conquests of Napoleon. If we were asked by what characteristic the present age will be marked in the record of its successors, we should answer—by the miracles that have been wrought in the subjugation of the powers of the material world, to the uses of humanity—and in its wonderful intellectual advancement.

No person I think will deny, that society in the present era, has adopted for its motto, "right onward." That it is distinguished above all others, by the desire and the power to advance. To resist such progress is not possible, or if possible, would not be lawful, since resistance would be nothing less than the wilful rejection of those benefits, which God's providence has scattered in our pathway.

Look only to the benefits which the oldest in this room, must remember to have been wrought in his own day—and the commencement of some of which have been witnessed by the youngest. Look for instance, to the valuable discoveries made, I may almost say daily, in the various fields of natural science. Look to the new powers with which the Telescope, and Microscope are invested, enabling us in a way more wonderful than any which man's imagination could have conceived possible to see

"A system in every star, a world in every atom."

The progress of that glorious science, which owes so much to the revelations of the Telescope—since its first rude beginnings, has been astonishingly rapid.

The instruments for the observation of the Heavens, in the ancient world, were of the simplest kind. The vertical pillar first determined the sun's altitude by means of its shadow. The obelisks with their ball-crowned summits—the tower of the winds at Alexandria, with its eight faces, rudely measured, and noted for ages the apparently involved, and complicated movement of the Heavens.

The modern world beginning with the dim conceptions of

Copernicus; "the morning star," bright harbinger, ushering in the full and perfect day of astronomical knowledge, on through the wonderful discoveries of Gallileo.

"Illustrious Sage!

Whose keen perceptions, pierced the cause
Which gives the pendulum, its mystic laws,
Who traced each orb, with telescopic eyes,
And solved the eternal clockwork of the skies;"

to Newton, of whom Pope well sung,

"God said let Newton be, and all was light."

And ending with the astounding revelations of the telescopes of Herschell and Lord Rosse—all prove that the glorious science of astronomy, has been onward, right onward.

It required a mighty reach, beyond the belief that suspended the starry lamps from a solid firmament, to give light by night: when star-eyed science, fully proved by analogical reasoning, beautiful, as it was convincing: that our sun was but the nucleus of a family of habitable worlds, like that we live upon—and the twinkling stars of heaven, were other suns of other systems, still more glorious than ours.

It was still a higher reach, when all this countless host was looked upon, as forming a single harmonious whole, upon whose wide spread galaxy, our sun itself was but a feeble and obscure borderer. And when at last, the wondrous tubes of Herschell and of Rosse, revealed far—far away in infinite space, a multitude of separate fleecy cloudlets, as mighty systems, each like the universe of stars around us, then did imagination, taught of reason, spring with free and joyous pinion, to where the lightnings flash, should spend a thousand years in reaching: and marked it as the distance of these far off orbs.

And in the onward progress of this noble Science, it may be reserved, for some within the sound of my voice, to recognize as undoubted truth the glorious theory of Mædler;

and the far reaching telescope of some brighter day, yet discover still deeper in the abyss of space—the grand central sun, around which, in harmonious order, move the millions of systems, which the Omnipotent, in the boundless prodigality of his creative power, has scattered through space.

It is not my intention to go through the long catalogue of wonders, which science in every branch is developing in our day, for space and time would fail me. Let me turn your attention briefly to the most wonderful. Look to the spark of the electric telegraph, darting with lightning speed through realms of space, and as it darts, communicating thought from man to man. With the rapidity of the lightning's flash, it equally speeds the messages of love, or the summons which inexorable justice sends after its victim. Its terrible force, is under the most absolute discipline and restraint—and when the murderer has fled from his victim on the wings of steam, the lightning flash along the telegraphic wire, has overtaken him by a still speedier messenger, and ranged the officers of justice, at the termination of his flight, standing there calm, instructed, and collected—ready to examine his bloody hands, hundreds of miles from the spot, where a few hours before, the cruel deed was done. The enchanted horse of the Arabian magician—the magic carpet of the German sorcerer, were poor contrivances compared with the wires of the telegraph, by which all the difficulties of time and space are overcome.

In the Scandinavian mythology, we read, that certain spiritual powers of evil, possessed the facility of passing with imperceptible speed, from point to point. But what of all this, when compared to the effects of an electric current, which it is said, can pass over, if space were allowed it, 576,000 miles in a second of time. This throws the speed of the Scandinavian deities somewhat in the shade.

Look, also, to the wondrous effects which have been produced in our own day, by the agency of steam, and see

what centuries of improvement in comparison with the past, the last half century has produced. I would not wish to speak of it in my own words, let me employ the nervous and condensed language of our eloquent Webster.

"Everywhere practicable, everywhere efficient, it has an arm a thousand times stronger than Hercules, and to which human ingenuity is capable of fitting a thousand times as many arms as Briaricus. Steam is found in triumphant operation on the seas, and under the influence of its strong propulsion—the gallant ship

"Against the wind, against the tide,
Still steadies with an upright keel."

It is on the rivers, and the boatmen may repose on their oars. It is on highways, and exerts itself along the courses of land conveyance. It is at the bottom of mines, a thousand feet below the earth's surface. It is in the mill, and in the workshops of the trades. It rows, it pumps, it excavates, it carries, it draws, it lifts, it hammers, it spins, it weaves, it prints. It seems to say to men, at least to the class of artisans—leave off your manual labor, give over your bodily toil, bestow but your skill and reason to the direction of my power—and I will bear the toil, with no muscle to grow weary, with no nerve to relax, no breast to feel faintness."

Such are the words of America's proudest Statesman.

Now, if such be among the marvels of the present age, is there any human being that can say—that his own position in the world is not affected by them? Not now to enumerate all the changes which may arise, I would ask him, whether there be not a positive addition made hereby to his own existence? I mean not of course, an addition to the days, weeks, months, and years by which the course of his life is reckoned: but an addition to all the appliances, and means of usefulness, which may and ought to be exerted within these limits. Life is virtually prolonged, whenever

the facilities of sight and motion, thought, and knowledge are multiplied, and if it be so, then a great responsibility has been committed to the charge of all of us, high or low, rich or poor—a higher value is imparted to the trust, and heavier will be the sin of throwing it away, or employing it unprofitably. I know not how I can better enforce this consideration—than by citing the following passage, from a speech delivered by Sir Robert Peel, a Statesman taken from his country, all too soon.

"The steam engine and the railroad," says he, "are not merely facilitating the transportation of merchandize—they are not merely shortening the duration of journeys, or administering to the supply of human wants;—they are speeding the intercourse between mind and mind—they are creating new demands for knowledge—they are fertilizing the intellectual, as well as the material waste—they are removing the impediments which obscurity, remoteness or poverty may have heretofore opposed to the energy and progress of real merit."

These beautiful sentences of England's most gifted statesman, are pregnant with meaning. They describe, accurately, the benefits which result from the agency of that mighty instrument—steam; and the years which have elapsed since they were spoken, have but supplied fresh and diverse testimony in support of the same truth. That mighty agency has learned to work for millions, as well as the few. It is fast breaking down the few impediments opposing the energy and progress of real merit. It *is* speeding intercourse between mind and mind. It *is* creating new demands for knowledge. It *is* fertilizing the intellectual waste. And more than all, it will yet drive human labor from the earth, and be the one laborer, the slave and drudge of universal man. It will create means of existence for myriads more. It will give us men with leisure, feeling, thought, hope, intellect—thus being one of the great agencies in effecting the culture of mankind for the harvest of happiness.

By the agency of this wonderful power, you now employ with perfect composure, every day, for the purposes of business or of pleasure, means of transportation from place to place, which if they had been described to you a few years since, would have appeared strange and unreal as the fabled stories of Arabian enchantment. You dart through hills, you fly across valleys, you cleave the way right onward in spite of wind or tide. The locomotive, with its sounding train, realizes to the life, the picture drawn of the demon black steed in Motherwell's ballad of "Halberd the Grim :—"

"Though starless the sky, and
No moon shines abroad,
Yet flashing with fire, all
At once shines the road.

And the black steed, I trow
As it rush'd fiercely on,
With a hot sulphur halo,
And flame flash all shone.

From eye and from nostril
Out gushed the pale flame,
And from its chafed mouth
The churned fire froth came.

Ho! onward, still onward
He slopeth his way,
No let hath his progress,
No gate bids him stay."

In view of all this one can readily pardon the enthusiasm generated in some minds on this subject, and which has recently induced a certain writer to explain, by the system of railroads, the mystical version of the chariots by the prophet Ezekiel, and other scripture passages, which he says "have reference to railroads and railway conveyances by locomotive carriages; and the more the form and construction of the powerful engine, in connexion with the carriages, are carefully and minutely examined and compared with effects, the more opinion strengthens, and conviction confirms the

truth, that it is altogether of divine origin, and little short of a miracle, that after the lapse of so many ages, the description of it should be handed down to us, in the nineteenth century, in language so appropriate, so true, intelligible and descriptive, that it is impossible to mistake its meaning. For although Ezekiel saw four living creatures, destined for the four quarters of the globe in the fullness of time, he shows clearly their component parts were of iron, and burnished brass, containing inwardly fire without consuming itself—fire of coals sufficiently large and active to send upwards a lengthened wreath upon wreath of crystal colored cloud, and their centre to be of burnished brass—as with lightning speed they winged their way, emitting sparks as from forged iron, instinct with a vital spirit unknown, till steam and its powerful effects were disclosed to man by the manifold wisdom of God. The force of steam escaping, panting as with the breath of life, is accurately described by the prophet; and the beautiful confusion of ideas, to give expression to the extraordinary sounds, applicable to what he saw and heard, when four living creatures started at one moment, is grand in the extreme, and true to the letter."

But such interpretations, however ingenious, are not palatable to the sincerely religious. Returning more immediately to our subject:—by the agency of this wonderful power of steam, over land, and over sea, you still hold on your course with a strength that knows no weariness, and with a swiftness that well-nigh outstrips the bird's most rapid flight, or the hurricane's wildest sweep. Through its agency, you reckon safely upon reaching countries in fewer days than were the weeks required by your fathers. You travel eastward, and in less than twelve days you have left the wide Atlantic behind you, and are walking in the busy streets of Liverpool or London. Still onward, and you cross the German Ocean, and your untired foot, in eight days from London, presses the flag stones of St. Petersburg. You enter upon a southern voyage, and a fortnight from

London sees you in Alexandria, and four weeks more in India. Within what limits are we to be confined? Let but a little more skill and force be added to these wondrous instruments of human power, and we may think that, as fairy messengers, we shall be ready even to do the bidding of King Oberon, that putting

"A girdle round the earth in forty minutes,"

we may fetch him the "little flower," for which he calls,

"And be back again

Ere the Leviathan can swim a league."

What, then, is the duty of all classes, in the community, who find themselves placed in the midst of changes so numerous and vast? Should not our effort be, to gain for all classes, by every means within our power, the amount of benefits thus placed within their reach. To this great end, to use the words of Dugald Stewart—"Heave the log into the deep, and measure the rapidity of the current by which the world is borne along." We cannot, I repeat it, stop the current, if we would; and we ought not, if we could. Neither may we stand idly by, trusting to the strength of the moorings to which our vessel is made fast; for the stoutest cables may give way, and the strongest vessel may drift, and be lost among the shallows. Let each and all of us, then, strive to turn in the best direction, the stream which is carrying us forward. Let us open for it a free course, into regions where it is most needed, and rejoice as we see it fertilizing the intellectual as well as the material waste.

There are persons in every community, I know, who care not to use an effort to accomplish anything. They love the old beaten track in which they have been taught to move. They would have no change. Things were well enough before—why change them? Why talk of improvement where none is needed? Why make a step in advance, when the ground on which we stand is sufficient for our purpose. I scarcely know how to deal with such men. They remind

me of those disciples of the philosophy of Aristotle, who, when the Telescope was first invented, were so alarmed lest the theory which had been so familiar to their minds should be disturbed, that they positively refused to look through the instrument. Or to take an illustration nearer home—it seems to me that these objectors, if they are so really afraid of moving onward in the fair and lawful path of advancement, and would be consistent with themselves in all things, are bound to make application to have the old Troy coaches brought out of their hiding places, and be content with a two days drive over the country, to New York, instead of speeding thither and back in less than ten hours. How far they are prepared to act on such a plan, or how many fellow travellers they deem it likely will bear them company, I leave it for them to determine.

You, who have enrolled yourselves as members of this Association, which has for its object intellectual improvement, entertain no such narrow views. You have joined this Association with a higher aim—a higher intent. You are in the enjoyment of hours, not devoted to labor—those hours you have determined to employ in a profitable manner, in acquiring information, in collecting those literary stores; from whose abundance you may enjoy pleasures that never end. By so doing, you launch your bark boldly into the current, determined to keep pace with, and answer the high demands which this wonderful age has upon you.

Turn we now to the consideration of another, the last subject to which I propose to invite your attention—namely certain general principles and rules, which may assist at least the younger members of this Association, in employing profitably the hours gained from business.

All hope to find means of intellectual improvement in the opportunities which may be afforded, in such an Association as this is designed to be. Let us then consider how the best use may be made of the opportunities here offered.

Take heed in the first place, that you do not mistake of

misplace the real end proposed by the acquisition of knowledge. That its end may be mistaken, and that such mistakes are capable of being proved, fraught with the greatest evil, is not to be questioned.

Observe the single testimony given by Lord Bacon, in his advancement of learning.

"Men have entered (he tells us,) into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon a natural curiosity, and inquisitive appetite, sometimes to entertain their minds with vanity and delight—sometimes for ornament and reputation, to enable them to a victory of wit and contention—and most times for lucre and profession—and seldom sincerely to give a true account of the gift of reason for the use and benefit of man."

Herein you may perceive a just philosophical division, made by this great philosopher, of the mistakes which men commit with respect to the end of knowledge and the views which ought to be taken of it by all.

And then follows that, which is one of the chief characteristics of Bacon's writings; the rich poetical imagery he employs to make manifest the truth before enunciated.

"As if there were sought in knowledge, a couch whereupon to rest a searching restless spirit—or a terrace for a wandering and variable mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect—or a tower of state for a proud mind to raise itself upon; or a fort and commanding ground for strife and contention, or a shop for profit and sale, and not a rich store house for the glory of the Creator, and the relief of man's estate."

These, are indeed noble words. The glorious temple of knowledge in our favored land, lifts up its majestic front—and before the humblest, its portals are open wide. The lowliest, by the aid of Associations like this formed to-day, may draw near and enter—may traverse the rich chambers of its store-houses—and count all the wealth that it yields. Who shall forbid his progress? Who shall venture to bar

up the avenues of approach, and say, there is no admission for him. That the treasures heaped up in this glorious temple are not in the noble words of Bacon, "Treasures destined for the relief of man's estate."

In the eloquent words of Bishop Doane—"God has not done it—man cannot do it. Mind is immortal—mind is imperial. It bears no mark of high or low, rich or poor. It heeds no bound of time, or place of rank or circumstance—It requires but light. It is heaven-born, and it aspires to heaven. Weakness does not enfeeble it. Poverty cannot repress it. Difficulties do but stimulate its vigor—and the poor tallow chandler's son that sits up all the night—to read the book which an apprentice lends him, lest the masters eye should miss it in the morning—shall stand and treat with kings—shall add new provinces to the domain of science—shall bind the lightning with a hempen cord, and bring it harmless from the skies."

You have received the gifts of an immortal spirit—senses, affection, reason. What more gifts, or gifts more precious does any man possess. It were impossible then to say truly that the means supplied of cultivating the gifts common to all men, are to be confined to the few who have entered in, and that others may not, must not follow them. The very thought is impiety. It is an inheritance with which the whole world may be enriched—and here, in our own fair land, whose strength is to be measured by the intelligence of her people, whose foundations are only to be made sure and steadfast by the education and intellectual advancement of the poorest, and the lowliest; it is the duty of every man who loves his country, to aid by the building up of Associations, similar to the one whose foundation stones have been laid this day, the spread of information among the industrial classes.

To those mechanics, who have already enrolled, or intend to enroll themselves as members of this Association—it is for them to say, with the true ends and scope of knowledge thus set before them, how the opportunities afforded by

such an institution as this, shall profit them? Will they turn aside and seek some couch, whereupon to rest a searching and restless spirit—and deem that they are profitably employing their time, gained from other occupations—or will they be content to walk up and down, as upon a fair terrace, so that while the mind is still wandering, and variable, the eyes only may be gladdened with a prospect, which soon vanisheth—or will you build up a tower of state for a proud mind to rest upon, or entrench yourself as in a fort, for strife and contention.

Believe me, it is forbidden to make the acquisition of knowledge depend on any such object—and although it is not forbidden to seek refreshment and repose for the wearied mind, or to spread before it visions of ideal beauty—or to acquire those materials, which in some mode or other, will minister hereafter to your pleasures—yet be assured that these advantages will be even more precious, when they are sought after, not for their own sake, as the sole end for which knowledge is desirable; but when they rise up spontaneously, and freely in your way towards the attainment of an end yet loftier. Seek to obtain knowledge for the benefit of man's estate, not for its own sake, but when acquired, that you may, in no selfish spirit, encourage it in others, that you may infuse into other breasts, the same desire that animates your own. This is what Bacon means, by the relief of man's estate.

The Grecian orator, Isocrates, in his famous panegyric of Athens, understood this principle, when he most beautifully declared, "Men appoint prizes of value for combatants, who excel in bodily strength and address—yet if the qualities most beneficial to others be the best entitled to regard—the accomplishments of the mind ought to be preferred before all other advantages. The wrestler may increase his own activity—the racer may redouble his speed—but neither of them can transfer any share of their excellencies to another. For the powers of the body can never be communicated;

but the wisdom of the mind, when rightly used, diffuses itself through whole communities."

How forcible the language of the Grecian orator?

"Physical labor is useful because it gives strength to sinews, elasticity to muscle—but its benefits are limited to the body, whose strength it increases. Mental cultivation on the other hand, has no such selfish operation—it is world wide in its objects, world-embracing in its results. It carries light and improvement everywhere along with it—and all who have minds to retain instruction, may reap from it, not only the purest pleasure, but the most solid advantage."

But the mere fact of your names being enrolled in the list of members of this Association, will not secure the real benefits, which it is the design of this Association to give. You have taken one step indeed, and that in a right direction; but it will have been taken in vain, unless followed up by a determination to apply yourselves right manfully to the building up of your Association, and the improvement of your spare hours among the intellectual treasures, that may thus be brought within your reach. If you wish for benefits from this Association, it must be by the proper and legitimate exercise of the faculties which God has given you, just as the bird mounts up to Heaven only when it spreads its own wings, and soars by its own living power.

But some of you may say, it seems well nigh useless to devote any time to reading, when the hours that can be appropriated, are so few, and those only to be had after a long day of toil. To this I answer, that the efforts which you must make will be the best proof of their value, and there is no way in which the greatness of their value, can be so truly made manifest, as by devoting them to an assiduous cultivation of the opportunities by this Association. The very pains you must take to make those hours useful, will induce habits, the benefits of which will spread themselves to every portion of your lives. Nay more, the positive advancement you will find yourselves making, will be far greater than

any who regard the matter vaguely, and from a distance can conceive to be possible you have abundant evidence of the truth of this fact, in the achievements which men have been enabled to accomplish in every department of human enterprise, under circumstances of much heavier difficulty, than you have to contend against.

I need but remind you of the lives of Simpson, Ferguson, in England—and Franklin, the tallow chandler's son, who despised sleep, that he might read the book his fellow apprentice loaned him, who stood proudly before kings, and added new domains to science—as remarkable testimony to prove the amount of knowledge, that may be acquired and diffused, by the systematic use of hours gained from labor.

I do not suppose that the opportunities afforded by such an institution as this, is calculated to make men of science and philosophers, or to perfect them in all the branches of knowledge—but it will most undoubtedly give, if the pursuit is rightly followed, and the opportunities here afforded, rightly used, a taste for reading, a desire for information. Pope has said,

"A little learning is a dangerous thing,
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."

But the aphorism of the poet is not true in all cases. If it was, there would many of us be in danger; for the learning possessed by any one is, after all, but little, compared with that which is yet to learn. And even after we have learned what the world believes to be much, we are then only in a condition the better to comprehend the immense stores laid up in the great treasure house of knowledge. Even Newton, when he looked back upon the train of deep research which enabled him to seize upon the law that holds together the universe, and guides suns and infinite systems in their eternal courses, could exclaim, "I do not know how I may appear to the world; but to myself, I seem only like a boy, playing on the sea shore, and finding sometimes a

brighter pebble or a smoother shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lies all undiscovered before me." And such have ever been the feelings of the wisest and most learned; and that they are just feelings, the Poet I have quoted, acknowledges, when in the context of the very same passage he goes on to say—

"Tired, at first sight, with what the muse imparts
In fearless youth, we tempt the heights of arts,
While from the bounded level of our minds,
Short views we take, nor see the lengths behind;
But more advanced, behold with strange surprise,
New distant scenes of endless science rise;
The increasing prospect tires our wondering eyes,
Hills peep o'er hills, and Alps o'er Alps arise."

To argue, therefore, as some men have attempted to argue from the familiar lines of Pope, that men who have not the opportunity of becoming profoundly versed in learning ought not to learn anything, is to bring us to a conclusion, which proves too much; for it would prohibit men from making the attempt to think or learn at all. What! is there to be no middle ground between the loftiest heights of philosophy, and the depths of brutish ignorance? Because I cannot drink long draughts from the Pierian spring, may I not stoop down for a moment, faint with the dust and turmoil of the world, and slake my thirst in its refreshing waters? Because I cannot measure the length and breadth of God's glorious temple, may I not stand even upon the threshold, and gaze upon its splendours? No, gentlemen, there is no such disproportion as this in the world. No! it is right that all should use the opportunities afforded them for intellectual culture, be those opportunities great or small. And in such an association as the one organized to-day, believe me, the smallest portion of time snatched from hours of business and labor, may be improved; and those who have to-day laid the foundation stone of this association, if aided by the zeal and hearty co-operation of the mechanics of

Burlington, may yet have the gratification of beholding an Institution, whose well assorted Library, and course of Scientific Lectures shall work an amount of good, which if now set forth, would appear ridiculously extravagant.

Other cities in the Union have reared up similar institutions to the one now organized, and their triumphant success is an earnest and pledge of what may be done by systematic effort, and a desire to obtain information. Newark and New Brunswick, in your own State, now boast large and well assorted libraries and reading rooms, under the control of mechanics. Let it not be longer said that Burlington, with a large proportion of her population mechanics, still lags behind her sister cities. Let her mechanics put their hearts in this work. Let them determine to devote some portion of that money, which is now foolishly spent, to securing a literary investment here; and the rich returns will come in, not in dollars and cents, but in that which is more "precious than rubies," the diffusion of literary intelligence.

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